

INTERTEXTUALITY IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *WIVES AND DAUGHTERS*

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ABSTRACT

Intertextuality can be considered as a complex process of intertwined influences and relationships of texts, authors, genres and the outside world.

Gerard Genette uses the term 'transtextuality' rather than that of intertextuality, and proposes five types: Intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, and hypotextuality. There are several examples of intertextuality in *Wives and Daughters*. For instance, in naming the governess of Molly Gibson Miss Eyre, Elizabeth Gaskell is, according to the five 'transtextuality' subparts of Gerard Genette, making use of hypotextuality (Genette 1996, 2007).

The interest in the paper is mostly focused on the novel of Mrs. Gaskell *Wives and Daughters* which is not only a work of fiction but beyond that it is about metafiction, so what is intertextuality? How does the writer use the techniques of this concept? And of course for what purpose?

According to Lodge, intertextuality "is not, or not necessarily, a merely decorative addition to a text, but sometimes a crucial factor in its conception and composition" (1992: 102). One may formulate it differently; intertextuality helps to shape a work of art and not only to embellish it, therefore it determines form and content.

KEYWORDS: Intertextuality, Metafiction, Text, Reader

INTRODUCTION

Intertextuality is a subtle interplay of writing and re-writing, and as it is maintained, "is the very basis of literature...all texts are woven from the tissues of other texts" (Lodge 1992: 98-99). and according to Lodge, intertextuality helps to shape a work of art and not only to embellish it, therefore it determines form and content (1992: 102). Thus, what is intertextuality? What are the techniques of integrating the intertext used by Mrs. Gaskell in *Wives and Daughters*? And what is the purpose of using it?

DEFINING INTERTEXTUALITY

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the "European novel prose is born and shaped in the process of a free (that is, reformulating) translation of other's works" (1981: 378). For Bakhtin, the novel is where intertextuality is more intense than in other literary genres, though he never uses the term intertextuality, rather, he proposes 'polyphony' which in its turn implies dialogism (Achour & Bekkat 2002: 104-5). A dialogism not only between texts and authors, but between texts and 'the world of lived experience' as Scott Lash observes (Chandler 2008).

Michel Foucault writes 'each work belongs to the indefinite murmur of writing' (Achour & Bekkat 2002: 117). It is this 'murmur' that gives literature its memory. Intertextuality is then a complex process of intertwined influences and relationships of texts, authors, genres and the outside world.

Umberto Eco argues that 'no text is read independently from the experience that the reader has from other texts

(Achour & Bekkat 2002: 123). Intertextuality is, according to Riffaterre, “a modality of perception, the deciphering of the text by the reader” (1980: 625), it is then a matter of decoding and interpreting a text as Julia Kristeva explains: “intertextuality describes the foundational activity behind interpreting cultural meaning”, she adds that “whatever meaning we discover or posit can only occur through a network of prior ‘texts’ that provide the context of possible meanings and our recognition of meaning at all” (Kristeva 1986)

It is, then, the reader who starts the mechanism of intertextuality. A mechanism where ‘a text T_2 is enriched by certain semantic values that come from its intertext T_1 ’ (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1977: 130).

During the process of reading, the reader might perceive “similar comparabilities from text to text” or assume that “such comparing must be done even if there is no intertext at hand wherein to find comparabilities” (Riffaterre 1980: 626), thus the intertext is a text taken from another text, and intertextuality is the process by which these comparabilities, similarities and differences are decoded in the mind of the reader; it is then a matter of the reader’s interpretation of a given text. Riffaterre’s several definitions of intertextuality and intertext lead to the following understanding of intertextuality as being “a structured network of text-generated constraints on the reader’s perception”. For Riffaterre, intertextuality is based on ‘a system of difficulties’, ‘limitations of freedom of choice’, ‘exclusions’, all related to the reader since he/she is the one who is going to identify the intertext and therefore decode intertextuality (Riffaterre 1994: 781).

Julia Kristeva considers every text as “a mosaic of references to other texts, genres and discourses. Every text or set of signs presupposes a network of relationships to other signs like strings that have lost their exact references” (Kristeva 1986).

Hence, no text is unique or original in itself as Roland Barthes declares that a text is a “multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations... The writer can only imitate a gesture... His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the other” (quoted by Chandler 2008).

Intertextuality is not only the ‘influences’ of writers on each other, but much more than that. It is the impact of genres on each other as well. Nathalie Piégay-Gros argues that “the renewal of works, the abandonment of particular genres, or the birth of new forms” are related to “the interplay of the established relationships between works”, it is this process “that drives the evolution of texts” (quoted in Achour & Bekkat 2002: 103).

Wolfgang Iser emphasizes the fact that a text’s repertoire is always a mixture of ‘anterior literature and extratextual norms’ (1976: 144-5), as well. Thus, intertextuality possesses a kind of dialogism (Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept). There are dialogues between texts, authors, and even literary forms or genres (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1977: 131-33).

Christiane Achour and Amina Bekkat question the comprehensiveness of a text that is full of intertextuality. They argue that a given text remains comprehensive and keeps its structure- even if there is intertextuality- depending on the way the original text is used.

EXAMPLES OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN MRS GASKELL’S WIVES AND DAUGHTERS

In naming the governess of Molly Gibson Miss Eyre, Elizabeth Gaskell is, according to the five ‘transtextuality’ subparts of Gerard Genette hypotextuality (Achour & Bekkat 2002: 107-111 and Chandler 2008), making use of, for as soon as Mrs. Gaskell calls her governess Miss Eyre, the reader automatically goes back to the novel of Charlotte Brontë **Jane Eyre**. Therefore, the simple reference of this character makes the reader believe that there would be a love-affair ending in the marriage of the master with the governess, but this will never happen. Dr. Gibson marries a governess, but not his; the Cumnors’. According to Leah Price, Mrs Gaskell named one of her governesses Eyre “only to dismiss her:

first by depriving her of psychological depth and direct discourse, then by packing her off to the seaside, into quarantine, and out of the novel" (1995: 757).

Intertextuality is the reference to real figures, as when Mrs. Gaskell named her characters; the two sisters, Browning which seems to be a reference to Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barret Browning. There is, as well, the reference to characters of fiction, as when she named Molly's governess Miss Eyre; which is a reference to Charlotte Brontë's heroine Jane Eyre.

INTERTEXTUAL INTEGRATION TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED BY MRS GASKELL

Integration by Installation

Achour and Bekkat explain that the intertext is added either in italics, with quotation marks or even with a reference.

Mrs. Gaskell uses these devices several times in *Wives and Daughters*. For instance, when Molly shows her step-mother, who is ill, a letter from Cynthia, Mrs. Gibson replies "Oh, you dear little messenger of good news! There was one of the heathen deities in Mangnall's Questions²⁹ whose office was to bring news³⁰" (Gaskell 1986: 704). In this example, the intertext is added with a reference. In fact, there are two references, one concerning Miss Richmal and the other the *Odyssey*. The explanation of both references is provided in the notes to *Wives and Daughters*.

Another instance of the same kind, but with quotation marks this time, is when Osborne and Roger Hamley are at the Gibson's. Mrs. Gibson and Osborne discuss different topics and Elizabeth Gaskell employs Goldsmith's expression: 'they talked of the 'Shakespeare musical glasses' of the day'^{13,1} (Gaskell 1986: 216). Here again the novelist makes her reader go to the notes where she provides an explanation of the expression.

Integration by Suggestion

The mention of a name or title of a book, or even the simplest allusion makes the reader go back to other texts.

Elizabeth Gaskell uses this technique, too. Molly is in the library at the Hamleys and the Squire believes she is bored so he asks her to go to the fields with him "she was so deep in one of Sir Walter Scott's novels [...] in the very middle of the *Bride of Lammermoor*...her mind quite full of 'Ravenswood' and 'Lucy Ashton'" (Gaskell 1986: 103-104).

In this passage there are neither quotation marks nor a reference, but since Mrs. Gaskell provides her reader with the name of the author; even if the reader has never heard of this novel, by the simple mention of the writer the reader can locate the work of art referred to.

An example of allusion would be when Osborne Hamley died suddenly; Molly went to see her old friend the Squire in order to be by his side. It was night and she was going downstairs:

She trembled with fear...It seemed to her as if she should meet Osborne,
and hear it all explained...she did get down...the last steps with a rush of
terror – senseless terror of what might be behind her

(Gaskell 1986: 607)

In this passage there is no known name, title or reference, but there is an allusion. The allusion is to the Gothic;

¹ This note number 13 belongs to the quotation taken from *Wives and Daughters* ; it is a note that roots fiction into its real time.

Molly is terrified as she goes downstairs at the Hamleys. The Hamleys, as stated in the previous part of this chapter, embody the Romantic Movement, and in this literary trend many romantic writers used the supernatural and magical atmosphere, and talked about the dead, as beings of their human environment.

Integration by Absorption

When the text absorbs the intertext there is no proof of it, it is therefore up to the reader to interpret it according to his literary 'background'.

The example that seems to fit into this category is when Cynthia's wedding is approaching Lady Cumnor and her daughter Harriet go to the Gibsons to congratulate the bride-to-be. The scene of the coming luxurious carriage of the countess and the way Hollingford people react when seeing it, as well as the maid's hurry to her mistress to tell her about the 'visitors' remind the reader of a scene in Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen.

Maria had only just time to run up into the drawing-room...: 'please, ma'am, the great carriage from the Towers is coming up to the gate, and my lady the Countess is sitting inside' ...The family 'stood at arms' ...till Lady Cumnor appeared ...and then she had to be settled in the best chair, and the light adjusted before...conversation began.

(Gaskell 1986: 661)

The other way of adjusting the intertext to the text is by integrating canonised formulas in the narration. An illustration of this technique is a passage where Molly thinks about the goodness of her dead-friend Mrs. Hamley, and recollects a poem she has read;

Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

(Gaskell 1986: 258)

Mrs. Gaskell pastes this couplet by James Shirley within her text, in a conversation between Molly and her step-sister Cynthia, introducing it as a recollection by her heroine, and providing no further explanation.

The quotation implements the juxtaposition of discourse units mounted in a patchwork of discourses; it is "the repetition of a discourse unit in another's discourse" (Achour & Bekkat 2002: 116).

Elizabeth Gaskell 'repeats' a text without changing it when she describes Cynthia's power on people in introducing Goldsmith's couplet "He threw off his friends like a huntsman his pack, / For he knew when he liked he could whistle them back" (Gaskell 1986: 472). In fact, she uses it as an illustration of her statement about Cynthia Kirkpatrick.

Marilyn Butler considers the plot of this novel as a reproduction of a story written by a Swedish novelist Frederika Bremer's **A Diary** translated into English twice; in 1844 and 1845. The plot consists of two cousins who love the same man, but one of them is engaged to him and at the same time to another man who threatens her to make the affair public. Butler goes further in her investigation of the originality of Wives and Daughters' plot and finds a striking resemblance with Maria Edgeworth's Helen (1834), and claims that

There need be no doubt of that Mrs. Gaskell knew Helen: according to Lucy Poate Stebbins...Helen was a favourite of Mrs. Gaskell's; and it may even

have been because Helen was in her mind that she incidentally refers to Maria Edgeworth's tales as favourite reading matter...

(Butler 1972: 279-282)

However, Mrs. Gaskell explains that the plot has been given to her by her daughter Meta (Butler 1972: 279).

This statement is, indeed, the illustration of Roland Barthes' idea that none of the texts of fiction is original (Cited in Chandler 2008).

In Wives and Daughters Mrs. Gaskell told us the story of Molly Gibson and the daily struggles in her life of a little girl. Yet, beyond that story, we have another one which is embedded, the story of the development of the novel as a genre.

Elizabeth Gaskell provides plenty of literary references as naming her characters Browning or Miss Eyre in addition to references to earlier works and their writers such as Sir Walter Scott's The Bride of Lammermoor, Mrs. Hemans' poems and Maria Edgeworth's tales. Besides these literary references, Elizabeth Gaskell gives her point of view on the poetry of the late Romantics and kills off her character who represents this movement in order to represent the death of poetry and the revival of the novel, since by the end of the Romantic 'Era', poetry had regained its place as the literary form *par excellence*. Then with new devices introduced by writers - among them many were women, the novel superseded poetry and became the outstanding literary genre until nowadays.

CONCLUSIONS

Wives and Daughters proposes many literary references; poets, novelists, fictional heroes and heroines, and sometimes even passages taken from literary works. Almost all the literary references are in close relation to the heroine Molly Gibson, yet the use of so many intertexts and references is not only a case of intertextuality, but the whole of Mrs. Gaskell's novel Wives and Daughters represents a study of fiction through fiction itself.

When a work of fiction steps outside its original aim, i.e. to tell a story, and becomes a sort of criticism, this is called metafiction

In order to identify a novel as metafiction, there are characteristics and techniques employed by the writer as when he/she intrudes 'to comment on writing', or directly addresses the reader (1992: 207), by the 'juxtaposition of fictional characters and historical figures', or in discussing writing techniques' (Liu 1998). Yet, what is most characteristic about metafiction is its employment of intertextuality i.e. the allusion to literary references, 'creating biographies of imaginary writers', 'presenting and discussing fictional works of an imaginary character'(Orlowski 1996), or parodying 'realist text or official history'(Liu 1998).

The discourse in the novel is, then, a rather complex one based on dialogic relations between characters, the writer and his characters, as well as the writer's text with some other texts, and this reference to other texts is called intertextuality which is the use of a word (which has a given connotation), a text or even a character in another story. The combination of both, added to it the style of narration we reach metafiction.

Intertextuality is the most important in the discourse of the novel, for if the reader has no knowledge of what or whom the writer is referring to, he will only read it on the surface and miss its deepest meaning; we may speak then of a failure in decoding the text.

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